

[Letter from Woody Guthrie to Alan Lomax, ca. August 1940]

NEW ADDRESS % Will Geer Tobacco Road Stage Forrest Theater W. 49th St., New York City (Long Sonofabitch)

Howdy Alan:

Now concerning these here dam boats that you pull up a sail on, and go a skippin' up rivers, well, they just aint much I can say. You know, I wouldn't be a tall suprised to hear that Alan Lomax was slated to put on a pair of electric roller skates and go around knocking on back doors trying to get his share of the vegetables for a railroad mulligan breakfast, turn four handsprings backwards in the middle of town, and catch out on a forty cent taxi, changing clothes three times, to eat dinner with all of the senators. Nick just told me that you was out zig zagging around in the sail boat. Dont be like the soldier in the last war — he always run in a zig zag, and he got shot all to hell, he zigged when he ought to of sagged.

Now concerning the opera which you said you was suffering from, I'd like to get in on that if I could. If it's a gonna be a cat house one, I can practice up a little and make you a hand. I'm double plus as it is, but what we want is a 3X opera. That's what the vaudeville business needs, a cat house opera, and it could mighty well be named that. By the way, who's gonna catch the cats? Nick could help. Pete stays up so late that he could help catch them, but then again, he'd run them out of the neighborhood with that bastardly recorder. No, I like recorders. I have got certain hours that I love recorders. But Pete plays different hours. It's the same way up here where Cisco and me are a playing, on 44th Street, at Jimmy Dwyer's 'Sawdust Trail', he advertises 4 little White Pianos — and to go in there and have a dk., you'd swear and be damned they had 25. ...and there aint a lull between one piano and the other. Quick as one pinist gets done, another one

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swings out — they offered us \$15 apiece to appear up there for a week, but you know, I wouldn't set and listen them 4 pianos 2 hours a night for that money. They got some other entertainment that's purty fair, old time vaudeville actors and singers, but, hell's bells, you can't here the other 8 acts for them 4 little white pianos.

From the time that I walk in the doors at night — well, you just got one supreme thought, and that is to leave the whole east coast, to get away from Boston, Greenland, Iceland, Miceland, New York, Philly, and all of the towns that are likely to have pianos. That's why I'm writing to you about this here Opera, the swashbucking, hard hitting, hard cussi g n Opera — because as I've listened to these pianos 4 nights now, I've been able to recall millions of good american cuss words that I thought I'd forgot. I want to put them on paper, on the script, on the stage, and listen to actors lung them at the tops of their voices. We ought to hire all New York for our cast, and let the other 47 states come and cuss tenor from the audcience. Pianos are — well, people pay big money for them, lose them back to the finance company, families drift apart, sweethearts get to be strangers, wives take to nunnery, and husbands to monkeying around — small kids wander down the roads, folks migrate — I know now why 3,000,000 folks leave New York of a week end — it aint the weather, hell, it's the pianos. What the hell, have I deserted good old Oklahoma to wind up in the 'Piano Bowl'?

So, since CBS can always contact us in Washington, I'd like to come and help you on that Pianoless Opera if you can see your way. I got about 200 pages of single space stuff that you might be able to hoe something out of. (Roll over)

Harold and Elizabeth are going up the country for a week or more, and I got to look around for a warm place to stay.

McIntosh & Otis, (The Book Agents), say that Alliance is interested in the book, and that they are interested also in the Song Book — I went up there the other day and described

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to them the story I was writing, and they seemed to think it was the cat's pianos —; They think it will sell. Hope so.

Well, I got to eat breakfast. Take it easy. Write to me.

Woody